

Chase, Who Painted Pictures and Lived Life

THE LIFE AND ART OF WILLIAM MERRITT CHASE is true biography. Mr. Chase is not portrayed exclusively as a painter. Not for an instant are we allowed to lose sight of the intensely human being that struggled behind the brush and the palette and managed in the end to place his unique self in the created canvas.

Unique is perhaps a dangerous word; Chase's art was unusual as opposed to unconventional, subtle instead of revolutionary; "it held the elusive secret of style, and style is a quality of the master. It cannot be acquired, it is the most aristocratic and intangible of all the qualities that go to make a good picture."

He Loved the Exotic.

After Chase had finished his studies in Munich and had gained there such a brilliant reputation he descended upon New York and America, which were still in the Victorian age. The Hudson River school, with its miles upon miles of sedate landscape, and the devotees of pulchritude and flawless beauty held the day.

Against this "pernicious ideal prettiness" Chase was ardently combative. His was the chief inspiration that tided us over that dull transitional period to a newer and healthier art. These days saw the beginning of the Tenth street studio. Poor, and perhaps poorer than other young artists, Chase nevertheless managed to buy with a magnificent inconsequence most of the things his eye fancied—and his fancy usually led him to riotous color effects, gorgeous combinations and rare curios.

His wife in later years could tell many a tale of agonized self-denials poor Chase suffered before an array of quaint rings and costly treasures. Although his im-



WILLIAM CHASE'S PORTRAIT OF HIMSELF

agination fed on the exotic, his canvases show rare restraint and masterly subjugation of materials.

On Fifth Avenue.

Chase himself lent a picturesque presence to the life of lower Fifth avenue in the late '70s. The New York thoroughfare, which was unbelievably placid then, was little moved by the young painter in his Munich student's cap, accompanied by a sleek Russian hound and sometimes by a colored servant, Daniel, bearing up bravely under a conspicuous red fez.

Young artists of that period did not dream that they were leading the *vie de bohème*, and, quite as a matter of course, renovated their shirt fronts with Chinese white and dined comfortably enough in dark basement restaurants.

Chase was especially happy in his friends. The famous Tite Club, a band of congenial spirits whose pocketbooks were as meagre as their company was convivial, can boast of one episode at least that will go down in history.

It befell one summer that the members, including Chase, Saint-Gaudens, Alden

Weir, Hopkinson Smith and other future notables, were, as often happened, short of money. Schemings ripened into a canal boat trip up the Hudson and through the Erie Canal that set a good many people gaping. Hopkinson Smith, at a stipulated sum, was to write up the trip for *Scribner's*, and the artist members were to contribute their services as illustrators.

A Bizarre Voyage.

Like to Cleopatra's barge, an old canal boat was fitted up with ancient brocades, Oriental rugs and stringed instruments. Toward evening the gay cavaliers sailed away with banners flying, Japanese lanterns lighted and a gorgeous rug trailing in the water. The story of the consternation and the derision that this voyage caused would fill a volume, but the twelve free spirits came through unscathed and with a good story.

Chase went through life with much of the simple, wholehearted zest of his youthful years. The one absorbing interest, outside of his art, was his family. Whenever possible the members of his household, who were many, accompanied him on his frequent visits to Europe, and when not with him received every day evidence of his love and remembrance.

To his pupils he gave the essence of his genius, and, what is more, his living, creating presence and beautiful enthusiasm. He loathed deliberate affectations in art. His usual advice to the eager aspirant was, "Do not try to paint the grandiose thing. Paint the commonplace so that it will be distinguished."

THE LIFE AND ART OF WILLIAM MERRITT CHASE. BY KATHERINE METCALF BOOP. Charles Scribner's Sons. \$4.

The United States and Southeastern Europe

WHILE to the general public here in America the great war means the struggle on the western front, the deadly swaying back and forth on the soil of stricken France, the minds of Europe look toward the east whence the trouble came and where lie problems that will make a lasting peace impossible if they are not solved with farseeing wisdom.

The region known as the Balkans has always been a menace to the peace of Europe; indeed, to the peace of the world; for no nation is sufficiently isolated any longer to escape the effects of war in a civilized part of the globe.

Fascinating as are the volumes of letters from the front, the books that tell of the stress of battle, personal danger and personal heroism, those who look a little deeper sigh with regret that books of a more weighty character are not more generally read. Personal heroism however great, personal sacrifice however noble, will not disentangle the hideous web in which the world is now caught. Nothing but what Prof. Adkins calls "the hard thinking that hurts" will do that. The Balkan question calls for thinking and thinking hard and long.

A Serbian Viewpoint.

M. Savic's *Southeastern Europe* discusses the Balkans from the Serbian point of view. It is well done. His knowledge is great, and the warmth of his style carries the reader through pages of historical, descriptive and statistical matter with an interest as well sustained as good fiction inspires.

It is not Serbia as we know it that is the protagonist of M. Savic's book. It is the nation of the Serbo-Croats, scattered about the Balkans, living, many of them, under Hungarian, Turkish or Russian rule. Serbia as an independent kingdom was merely one effort in a century long struggle for independence. The crushing of that little kingdom and the terrible retreat of the Serbian army through the mountains of Albania is one of the heaviest tragedies of four years of war.

America's Chief Role.

M. Savic starts out by emphasizing the importance of the entrance of the United States into the war. This importance arises less from the material aid we can give them than from the fact that we alone of all the nations concerned have no selfish interests in the future settlement. Our Serbian author makes an impassioned plea to us to keep our hands clean in this respect, and to point the way to other nations, even if some of those to

whose aid we are now going are reluctant to take the path we point out to them.

He implores us to stand firmly for a federation of free Balkan nations which may stand as a bulwark against territorial aggression by the great Powers. If we can bring such a federation into powerful existence we will have removed a standing threat to the peace of the world.

It is interesting to note that M. Savic, in his chapter on *The Case of Austria-Hungary*, comes, through the identical reasoning, to the conclusion reached by Leon Trotsky in *The Bolsheviks and World Peace*. M. Savic says:

The existence of Austria-Hungary will mean the prolongation of the unsettled conditions in Central Europe and a permanent danger to peace.

Can the maintenance of Austria-Hungary be in the interest of democratic England, France and the United States?

The chapters dealing with Serbia's history immediately preceding the outbreak of the war, and with the crime at Ser-

jevo, are of great importance. M. Savic believes that "for all those who conspired against the world's peace and liberties the tragedy of Serajevo was the finest opportunity for letting loose their evil designs."

Serbia was not the cause of the war, but she was a cause of the war. The existence of Serbia meant for Austria the negation of her position as a great Power and a stumbling block in the way of her expansion.

The plans for a united Slav nation of Serbia, outlined as the Serb national aspiration, are of great interest. The book is indeed, as Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler tells us in his introduction, not a book for the specialist alone, but for every intelligent reader.

Prof. Adkins disarms criticism by the opening words of his preface to *Historical Backgrounds of the Great War*.

"In writing these pages," he says, "I have aimed rather at provoking thought

than at imparting exact information; and if a critical reader undertakes to check my statements he will doubtless find the book affords much valuable exercise."

After that one cannot politely spend much time checking a few statements which seem inexact. The conversational character of these essays makes them highly readable, and they really do provoke to thought. The book is addressed to English readers, and was written in the early months of the war. This last fact lessens the value of certain chapters, particularly those on Russia. Perhaps the author is rather too hard on English national shortcomings. But the English are used to hammering and take a lot of it rather well.

SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE. BY VLADISLAV R. SAVIC. Fleming H. Revell Company. \$1.50.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDS OF THE GREAT WAR. BY FRANK A. ADKINS. Robert M. McBride Company. \$1.25.



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